

## Abraham Lincoln papers

From Carl Schurz to Abraham Lincoln, March 19, 1864

New-York March 19th 1864.

Dear Sir,

Mr. Willmann<sup>1</sup> of this city, who delivered my last letter to you,<sup>2</sup> was informed at the White House, that you had written to me in reply, but as I have received no letter whatever from you, there must be some mistake about it. From what Mr. Willmann told me of his conversation with you I am led to believe that you consider my taking part in the electoral contest this summer as attended with some difficulty inasmuch as it would not be an easy thing to find a proper command and position for me afterwards. This as well as your silence upon my letters I can explain upon no other supposition than that you have entirely misapprehended my intentions.

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1 Andreas Willmann

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2 See Schurz to Lincoln, March 8, 1864.

Under present circumstances I do not want to appear or to feel bound by any favor from anybody. If I can take an active part in the political contest consistently with my position in the Army, I shall be glad to do so, expecting nothing for myself but to resume my old position and command after the election. If a political activity be deemed inconsistent with my military position, I shall then have to make my choice, either to remain in the Army and not to take part in the presidential canvass, or to resign my commission in order to take the political field.<sup>3</sup> I wish to assure you here emphatically, that in neither case I would make any demands on the Administration. I should, however, be glad to be advised a little beforehand as to which of these two contingencies is likely to take place as in either case I would have to make certain preparations.

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3 Lincoln had written Schurz on March 13 that "I would be very glad to have your service for the country in the approaching political canvass; but I fear we can not properly have it, without separating you from the military." See Lincoln to Schurz, March 13, 1864.

About this and several other matters of a political nature I desired to have a conversation with you. At a time like this I would not consider it out of place to volunteer my advice and opinion about a few points of some importance. And in order to have an opportunity for doing this I desired to have the necessary permission to visit Washington, where I also might have seen and consulted with several

of our political friends. I must confess, it is somewhat difficult for me to understand, why I did not receive that permission in reply to my letters—

In my first letter I took the liberty of asking you whether the rumor, that Gen. Hooker<sup>4</sup> would be assigned to another command, was true. If it is not true I shall be obliged to apply to the War-Dept. to be relieved of my present command under Gen. Hooker and to be assigned somewhere else.

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4 Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker

For your information I send you a copy of my argument before the Court of Inquiry which I have had printed for my own private use.<sup>5</sup> There is no Army in the civilized world in which an officer after such an occurrence would not be transferred to another command. I wish, however, to have it distinctly understood, that I do not aspire to anything larger or higher than I now have; that I would be completely satisfied with the command of a respectable division in some other Dept., Gen. Sigel's<sup>6</sup> for instance, unless he has already too many German generals with him, — and that, in case the 11th Corps is taken from under Gen. Hooker, I shall be quite content with the command I now have. I suppose, five minutes conversation with you or the Sec. of War would settle this matter without the least difficulty; if there should be any I might resign now. At all events I should be greatly obliged for some information on that point.

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5 Schurz and another officer had been accused of inefficient conduct at the battle of Wauhatchie, Tennessee (October 28-29, 1863). Schurz demanded a court of inquiry in which he was ultimately exonerated.

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6 Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel commanded the Department of West Virginia.

I am quite sick, suffering from all sorts of complaints common in camps. I expect however to be able in a few days to return to the Army. Until then I should be glad to know what I shall have to do, and on my way there to visit Washington, unless my presence there be particularly undesirable.

Very truly yours

C. Schurz

Prescott-house, Broadway, New-York